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An Abstract
of the
Address to the Graduates
delivered by
The Most Rev. P. J. Ryan, D. D.,
Archbishop of Philadelphia,
at the
79th Annual Commencement
of
Georgetown University,
June 23, 1896.

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YOUR EMINENCE, VENERABLE FATHERS, LADIES,
AND GENTLEMEN: I am invited to say a few parting
words to-day to the graduates of Georgetown University for 1896. What can I say to you young gentlemen which you have not already heard? I can but repeat the counsels which you have received in this venerable school of sanctity and of learning. As this, the crowning day of several years of study approached, your hearts were glad and triumphant, and—though you regretted to leave the men to whom you owe so much, and who have given their lives, in poverty and chastity and obedience, to the cause of your education—yet with all the ardor of youth, you sighed for the day when you would enter on your career in the world, and rejoice because that day was at hand.

With the wisdom born of thorough knowledge of the human heart illumined by divine light, your reverend preceptors, before the time approached, sent you into the solitude of a religious retreat for several days, where alone with God alone you could look into the depths of your own hearts and ask yourselves, What am I? Whence have I come? Whither am I going? What is the aim and object of the life amongst men on which I am about to enter? I am now a man, and must “put off the things of a child.” Life is a serious thing for

me, for eternity is dependent on it, for the talents which God may have given to me I must be responsible to Him. This retreat is an appropriate close to the education imparted in this institution. Here you have had great advantages. The education is Catholic, not only in the religious, but etymological sense of the term. It is universal—physical, mental, moral, and religious; but, whilst deeply religious, it partakes not of that gloomy spirit which has been unfortunately associated with religion in many minds. On the contrary, the young man is here taught that religion is the worship of God, and He is the God of the Beautiful, Who has given to the young heart the capacity for joy and happiness. True religion must recognize that element in man's nature, and he must be taught to serve the Lord, in the language of the Scripture, "with joy of heart." The Catholic Church, with a maternal instinct for the protection, preservation, and perfection of her children, desires to give them what is given in this institution—a thorough, all-round education. The powers and strength of the body are called out by the physical education in her gymnasium, and her athletic students are amongst the first in the land. Her intellectual education embraces all the branches of a great college and university curriculum. As the foundation of her moral education to make good Christians and upright citizens, she cultivates the great religious element which God hath planted in the human heart, and which is as real as the physical and intellectual elements.

You know and realize, young gentlemen, the admirable system of intellectual training in which you have been here educated. It is a system the result of the accumulated experiences of the ablest minds of the world during many ages. It takes many years to test a system of education. Its advantages may become at once apparent, but long experience may be necessary to discover its drawbacks. The educational system of the Jesuit Fathers has had centuries to test its merits. They have adopted all the improvements of the modern educational systems, which have had time enough to be duly tested. Like the Catholic Church herself, in which they are devoted ministers, they are sometimes thought to be behind the age; but they are only so, as chariot-eers are behind their horses, duly to restrain and direct, but not to retard true progress.

It is sometimes asserted that Catholic education dwarfs the intellect and contracts the heart by its partiality and sectionalism; that it fears to treat certain subjects which might diminish religious faith in its doctrines, and demands absolute submission, which amounts to intellectual slavery. You know, young gentlemen, how false and unfounded is this charge, and those who make it must on a little reflection be convinced, as you are, of its unreasonableness. Reason teaches that all truth must be from God in both the natural and the supernatural order, and that God cannot contradict Himself. He cannot reveal one truth in nature and its contradiction in religion. Therefore in proportion to the depth and strength of my

conviction that I possess religious truth is my fearlessness that any truth or fact in the natural order can arise to shake my conviction. If I have only religious impressions and opinions, more or less vague and uncertain, I may fear to have them upset by some new knowledge of the secrets of nature, but if I am as certain of my position in regard to religious truth as I am in regard to mathematical truth, though in a different order, I stand fearless of opposition. Now, it will be generally confessed that Catholic teachers have this conviction, which nothing can shake.

You well know, young gentlemen, how impartially and fearlessly the arguments of unbelievers have been stated and refuted in this great institution. Nor is there any slavish dwarfing of the intellect in submitting to the teaching of a church which that intellect has already accepted as the messenger of God to men. If such a messenger could err in the transmission of truth from the divine to the human intellect, there might be intellectual degradation in submitting in matters of faith to its declarations, but this is not the position of the Catholic Church. As the laws of the state do not destroy nor diminish your liberty, but preserve it, so the laws of the Church do not trample on, but preserve your intellectual freedom.

The second charge is equally untrue; that the system of training and education in Catholic institutions contracts the heart in its sphere of beneficence by confining its sympathies to the members of its own Church.

You know, young gentlemen, that you have been taught within these walls that charity knows no distinctions of religious or national character; that, on the contrary, the natural result of Catholic teaching is to intensify, to universalize and to perpetuate beneficence towards all men. You were taught to love your neighbor for God's sake and because of God's love to you. And as every man, created by God, bears His image upon his soul, so to our natural sympathy for our fellow-man is added a supernatural element of love for our Creator's sake. And as this image is universal, universal also must be our beneficence, and as this image is permanent, so also must be the effect which it produces. Many noble and tender hearts, who have loved their fellow-beings with merely human sympathies, have been chilled by ingratitude and have become misanthropic. If to the human motive they had added the supernatural one and understood the philosophy of Catholic charity their beneficence would have continued, unchilled by ingratitude and undiminished by disappointment. You have been told how our divine Lord and Model, when He would give to the world an example of fraternal charity, did not confine charity to the orthodox dogmatic religion. When a stranger, robbed and wounded, was left dying by the wayside, the orthodox Jewish Priest passed by and did not heed him, and the orthodox Levite did also pass by and did not heed him, whilst the heretical Samaritan unterrified by the possible return of the robbers, did bend

down over the wounded stranger and bound his wounds and placing him upon his beast brought him to the inn and thus saved him from probable death. Your teachers here in the spirit of Christ inculcated the broadness of true Christian charity, and these lessons you must act out in the future. Unite with your brethren of all religious denominations, or of no denomination at all, in acts of public beneficence, and stand with them on every platform where they meet to aid suffering humanity, and thus you act in the spirit of the Church which inculcates charity to all men.

It is also sometimes asserted that the influence of the Catholic teaching is to contract the heart in its devotion to one's country. This false and humiliating charge of want of patriotism amongst Catholics has occasionally been put forward. It is extremely difficult to answer such a charge in patience. A man's country is as his mother, and when a man is charged with not loving his own mother, his heart and not his head answers the charge, and almost irresponsibly tends to answer it through the medium of his right arm. If any man should charge a member of the Georgetown Athletic Club with not loving his mother or his country, it is probable that the only hope of safety for the accuser would be his ability to distance the champion runner of this University. Treat with deserved contempt such a charge and be ever loyal to your glorious country. You well know that your Church teaches that patriotism is a duty and a virtue, and thus elevates, intensifies, and consecrates

it. Should you be called in the future to participate in the government of your country, retain and act out the lessons you have here learned. Love truth and "the truth shall make you free." Be no slaves to party, but loyal to the truth you find, wherever it exists. Ever remember the glorious expression of an American Statesman, "I would rather be right than President." On the subject of the responsibility of public life I know of no one who has written more clearly or acted more surely than that political philosopher, Edmund Burke, and I can commend his writings and his example to you, if you should ever become public men. If you embrace some of the learned professions or engage in business, remember that you look forward and aim higher than mere money-making or empty fame. Act from a thought of supreme duty to God and man. You may not always achieve success, but you shall always attain that which is better than success, namely, to deserve it. The man who succeeds without deserving it is inferior to the man who deserves it without succeeding. Finally, gentlemen, amidst all the scenes of your future life, bear in mind the magnificent Ideal constantly kept before you during your course of study and training within this University, that Ideal is no other than that perfect Man and perfect Model of men, our Divine Lord. He has been, is, and ever shall be, the Model of the Christian gentleman with all the strength and power and dignity of humanity, united with all its sweetness and gentleness. Grouped around Him in

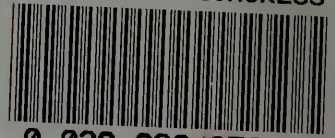


His own Society, you see the Fathers of that Society, adoring, loving, and imitating Him. Let the sacred memories and scenes of this holy home rise up before you in the days of future temptations, the illumined altar, the vested priest, the ascending incense, the sweet songs of praise and love, the emotions that thrilled your young hearts after Holy Communion. Let these be remembered in the hours of future conflicts, when your faith and your chastity may be sorely tried. You have a glorious mission to this age and country. Strength of faith, loyalty to authority, vigor of chastity, should be the effects of your education here, and with these strengthened and purified you go forth to act out your great destiny, to influence your age and country for good, and attain the ends for which God hath created you.

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